

School Safety and Health Efforts Help Revitalize a Community

Issue

McCarver Elementary School is located in the Hilltop neighborhood of downtown Tacoma, Washington. Hilltop is one of lowest income areas in the city and has a high crime rate. The 400 students at McCarver face a variety of barriers to healthy living and getting to school safely. Many parents or guardians feel it is unsafe for their children to walk or bike to school, so they drive them. This adds to traffic congestion. The school needed to find creative ways to encourage physical activity, and bicycle and walking safety.

Building on a strong working relationship with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, McCarver applied to be part of “Communities Putting Prevention to Work” (CPPW). CPPW provides federal stimulus dollars for towns and cities to make changes that encourage healthy eating, more physical activity, and reduced tobacco use. Projects that receive funding focus on policies and neighborhood changes that are shown to be effective in reducing obesity and smoking. McCarver organized a “Safe Routes to School” program.

Intervention

An existing network of health champions and local health department staff conducted an “audit” of neighborhood walking routes. This information helped the community identify safer, less congested streets for kids to use to get to school. It also identified needed improvements to sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks, and other infrastructure.

The school principal, student counselor, and outreach personnel worked with local health department staff to organize a series of “Walk to School” events over two years. They started a “walking school bus” where a parent and a school monitor escorted students along an identified safe route from home to school. The principal and counselor, who regularly bike to school, accompanied walking and biking groups from different areas in the neighborhood. Safety assemblies at school involved the local fire department. The health department promoted the program, offered safety instruction, and gave out healthy snacks and other incentives for students and parents.

Another way the school leverages resources for safety is through participation in a community revitalization effort called the [Zina Linnik project](#). The community built a new park next to the school as a memorial to the young McCarver student. The park is on the school walking route and now offers a safe place for neighborhood children to play.

Impact

Each “Walk to School” event motivated 100–150 students to participate. McCarver received so much positive feedback that they will continue and sustain these events in future years. Chelsey Lindahl is a health educator for the Multicare Center for Healthy Living, a partner in this project. She said, “It’s wonderful when community organizations are able to work together on grants like this. It creates a multi-level approach that is truly effective and sustainable.” Because of their success, McCarver recently received additional public health funding to expand their walking school bus and encourage healthy eating. The school and local health department believe their efforts to make policy and infrastructure changes using CPPW funds are strengthening the community and showing that prevention can make a difference.

Pierce County population: 814,600

Tacoma population: 198,397

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

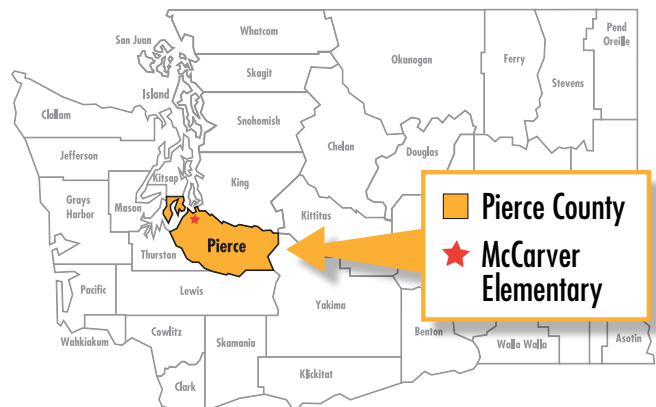
3629 South ‘D’ Street

Tacoma, WA 98418

Pierce



PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER WASHINGTON



For persons with disabilities this document is available on request in other formats.
To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TTY/TDD 1-800-833-6388).